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SALT Hear

The SALT Debate

Dr. Kissinger recently devoted one of his longest press conferences to a rebuttal of charges that the Soviets are violating the SALT agreement, but the controversy continues. Kissinger's statement, excerpted below, is challenged, at our invitation, by Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.)

KISSINGER:

"It is important to understand how the flow of information to the President is handled, because it is a rather grave matter it it can be alleged that information is being kept from the President of the United States."

Assertions have been made that there have been massive Soviet violations of the SALT agreement; that the Administration colluded with the Soviet Union in masking these violations; that the Administration has not pursued the issue of violations diplomatically; and that senior officials, especially the President, have not been kept informed about the facts with respect to these violations. I will not deal with specific testimony that may have been given except to note that no opportunity was presented to any member of the Administration to present the truth.

Now, first of all, what is meant by a violation? There are several meanings that can be attached to the notion of violation that are being used interchangeably in the current debate. A violation can be a deliberate violation of a SALT limitation, aimed at increasing the Soviet strategic capability in ways which the agreement was intended to preclude.

Second, a violation can be an action inconsistent with the sense of the spirit of the agreement and tending to undermine its viability even though it is not prohibited by the agreement. There can be borderline situations where a technical violation cannot be [illegible] strains the interpretation of particular provisions.

There are four institutions to deal with the problem of compliance. There is a special intelligence committee, established by the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, which makes a quarterly report on the problem of SALT compliance.

In addition, there are three other bodies. There is the Verification Panel of the National Security Council (NSC). There is the Verification Panel's Working Group. And there is, of course, the NSC itself.

It is important to understand how the flow of information to the President is handled, because it is a rather grave matter if it can be alleged that information is being kept from the President of the United States.

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The President receives daily, unabbreviated and without a covering summary, the President's daily brief and the daily intelligence bulletin of the Central Intelligence Agency. These are placed on his desk together with separate notes from various departments every morning and are waiting for him when he comes to his office. Therefore, any intelligence item that would deal with compliance would come to his immediate attention.

Secondly, any memorandum from a Cabinet member or from the head of an agency is transmitted to the President, usually with a summary by the NSC staff on top of it. But never is the summary alone sent to the President. Therefore any Cabinet member, any member of the Joint Chiefs, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, all have the opportunity, and know they have the opportunity to address the President directly. Never has the assistant to the President held up any memorandum from any of these individuals, or any other memorandum addressed to the President by the head of an agency.

However, there is no memorandum in the files by any of these individuals, by any chief of staff of any of the services, by any head of any department raising any of the issues that have been alleged in recent testimony.

The reason there have been so few NSC meetings on the subject is because the decisions of the Verification Panel have always been unanimous, and because no member of the panel has ever appealed to the President with a contrary view.

In one instance there were reports of unidentified construction in Soviet missile fields. We received this report on June 20 at a time when Brezhnev was in the United States.

When we approached the Soviet Union within six days of receiving that information in the White House, we were told that these would be command and control silos and that as the construction proceeded it would become increasingly evident that they would be command and control silos. We have since received assurances, and I believe it is the unanimous opinion of all agencies that we are dealing with command and control silos.

The most serious case, which comes closest to the borderline of a possible violation, has to do with the testing of certain antiaircraft radars in what might be considered to be an ABM mode.

We received information that some testing was going on with respect to the SA-5 radar in 1973. Between April an and June 1974 some more tests took place which raised the problem that the radar might be tracking incoming missiles. That clearly is not permitted by the treaty.

The first decision in December 1974 was, on the recommendation of the Defense Department and the Central Intelligence Agency, that this issue not be raised because we did not wish to reveal the source of our intelligence.

In January 1975 the Defense Department reversed itself and recommended that the issue be raised. As a result, the issue was raised in February 1975. Since then, within a 17-day period after we had raised the issue, this activity has stopped, has not since been resumed.

There are other issues, some having to do with unilateral American statements which the Soviet Union specifically disavowed. I think it is at least open to question whether the United States can hold the Soviet Union responsible for its own statements when the Soviet Union has asserted that it does not accept that interpretation. Therefore, the issue of SALT compliance has been handled in a serious manner. It stands to reason that no responsible U.S. officials could wish to make an agreement with the Soviet Union and permit the Soviet Union to violate it with impunity. It stands to reason that the United States would not accept noncompliance with an agreement that had any conceivable impact on the strategic equation.

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JACKSON:

"A fully informed President could not have said, without qualification, as did President Ford on June 25, that the Soviet Union has 'not violated the SALT agreement, not used any loopholes.'"

Even as Dr. Kissinger spoke, the Soviets were continuing to deploy numbers of a new missile, the SS-19. And they were doing so despite the fact that Dr. Kissinger had assured the Congress in 1972 that such a deployment would be regarded as a violation of the agreements. It is not surprising, therefore, that the secretary's statement did little to diminish the controversy surrounding the question of Soviet compliance with the strategic arms agreements.

In the ordinary course of events the American public could rely on the congressional hearing process to resolve such a question. But despite his remarkable claim to have been denied an "opportunity to present the truth," Dr. Kissinger has refused, for more than eight months, to appear before the Senate Arms Control Subcommittee to testify on the concerns about SALT compliance that arose with testimony in February and March from Secretary Schlesinger and CIA Director Colby.

The concerns in question have to do with Soviet activity since the SALT I Agreements were signed and the nature of the American response to that activity. Whether the Soviets have "violated" provisions of the agreements is a part, but only a part, of the larger question of whether the purpose and intent of those agreements has been circumvented; and on this issue the weight of the evidence leads to two unhappy conclusions: the Soviets have indeed circumvented the intent of the agreements; and the government of the United States has acquiesced in that circumvention.

In a number of important respects the SALT I agreements are almost impossible to violate. The terms are so ill-defined, the loopholes so numerous, the ambiguities so eminently exploitable that one would have to go out of one's way to "violate" the few precise terms about which a definitive judgment might be made. Only a fool would break down the front door if the back door were left unlocked.

But if one looks at the six or seven areas of Soviet activity that have aroused our concern, it is fair to say that they have, at the very least, found the back door conveniently ajar. The result has been a pattern of Soviet behavior that reflects as much on our lack of good judgment as their lack of good faith.

The outstanding example has to do with a provision in the interim agreement that sought to limit sharply the extent to which the Soviets would be permitted to add to the throw weight, or explosive power, of their missile force. Pyrrhic indeed was the victory Secretary Kissinger claimed he had won when the Soviets agreed in 1972 that they would not convert launchers for "light" into launchers for "heavy" missiles. For while the Soviets were ready to accept such a provision, they would not agree to a definition of the terms "light" and "heavy."

Determined nevertheless to get an agreement in 1972, the United States offered our own "unilateral" definition of a heavy missile and appended it to the agreement. Moreover, our officials stated clearly that if the Soviets deployed new missiles larger than our definition, we would regard those missiles as "heavy" whatever the Soviets might consider them to be. I expressed my misgivings to Dr. Kissinger about this unusual formulation at the White House in June, 1972 and was assured that we were adequately safeguarded against the Soviets deploying new "heavy" missiles. After all, putting a cap on the growth of their missile force had been one of our principal negotiating objectives; and the notion that we had succeeded in doing so was the principal Administration argument for accepting the many concessions that we had made in exchange.

The Soviets are proceeding to deploy their SS-19 missiles, nuclear armed rockets that greatly exceed the definition of a "heavy" missile that we solemnly announced to the world in Moscow in 1972.

Whatever happened to the United States' statement --and the Secretary of State's assurances—that we would regard such a deployment as a violation of the agreement? It has been revealed for what it was, and is: a fig leaf in a hurricane.

By acquiescing to the Soviet deployment of SS-19 missiles without a murmur, the administration has sent the Soviets an unmistakeable message: our own pledges notwithstanding, they are free to circumvent the intent of the agreement to their heart's content so long as they make a graceful entry through the back door. Or perhaps we are to believe that there is still another line, yet to be drawn, beyond which they will not be permitted to go? Against such a background, events in Portugal, in Angola, in the Middle East

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and elsewhere in the SALT I agreements become easier to understand.

But is it a violation? Of the letter? Of the spirit? It's both. A violation of our letter and their spirit. And for an agreement that is 90 per cent spirit and 10 per cent letter, we are at least 90 per cent justified in being concerned. A fully informed President could not have said, without qualification, as did President Ford on June 25, that the Soviet Union has "not violated the SALT agreement, not used any loopholes." That statement is false and it matters little how the formal structure of committees committees, panels, working groups, consultations and briefings is organized, on paper or in fact, if the end result is a President so ill-informed on so important a matter.

The lesson is clear. Any SALT II agreement must be precise. The terms and limitations must be defined. The Soviets must agree to state what weapons they now have and how these and future weapons will be affected by the treaty. There must be no loopholes, no ambiguities; the back door must not again be left ajar. And we must take the time necessary to negotiate an agreement that sets down the letter as well as invoking the spirit of what it is we wish to achieve. We should not have to say again, as Dr. Kissinger said of our ill-fated definition of a heavy missile, that it was "issued by the delegation...the last day of the negotiations, just to finish up the piece of paper."

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